

Government Shutdown Doesn't Go Far Enough

Make the Shutdown Comprehensive and Permanent

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Once again, the threat of a government shutdown looms over the capital. Politicians exchange barbs, pundits wag their fingers and wring their hands, and the rest of us get up and go to work like we do every day. The news anchors demand to know: whose fault is it? What labyrinthine eleventh-hour compromise will they devise to avoid it? The rest of the nation yawns with indifference.

But we want answers! What if the government *does* shut down? Who will funnel our taxable income to military contractors? Who will tap our phones and read our email? Who will raid 7-Elevens and deport people? Who will indoctrinate our children? Who will stop people from driving while black? Who will build the wall?

It doesn't sound all that bad, actually. Unfortunately, the "shutdown" they're talking about won't interrupt any of those things. Compared to what this country needs, it's just a bit of theatrics.

So here's a different proposal for how to respond to the imminent shutdown of the US government. Let's make it comprehensive and permanent.

What better way to cut through "partisan gridlock" than by abolishing both parties outright? Seriously, what have they ever done for us? Two gangs of thieves and swindlers competing to boss us around and bleed us dry. It's hard to imagine a single problem that any of them can resolve better than we could on our own. They themselves are responsible for most of the issues they claim to address.

In recent years, societies around the world have discovered that the absence of a functioning government has produced remarkably little change in their daily lives. Since its prime minister quit a year ago, Northern Ireland has functioned without its elected assembly doing a thing. In Belgium, in 2010 and 2011, 589 days passed without the establishment of a government with no noticeable change in everyday life for most Belgians. Similar interludes went by in Spain and Germany with similarly insignificant consequences.

This goes to show how much of a joke democracy is in postmodern capitalism. Cybernetic bureaucracies keep capital and goods flowing while states do little more than skim off the top and perpetuate violence against us. For the time being, it would be too controversial to entrust all that violence to private security, so they make us pay for it and call it a public service. But hardly anyone is still pretending that governments exist to *care for* human beings.

In this context, the dazzling and infuriating spectacle of partisan politics is basically a shiny distraction, while the corporations and functionaries who make most of the choices that shape our lives with no oversight from us continue redesigning the world to facilitate their profits. Voting is little more than an anachronistic ritual reinforcing this illusion. It's not good news that the average citizen of a Western democracy is so alienated from practical self-determination that he barely notices how irrelevant the only avenue for "participation" has become.

Elsewhere across the planet, however, we can find much more inspiring examples of society without government. In the autonomous cantons of Rojava, using a system of popular councils organized from the bottom up in neighborhoods and workplaces, Kurdish and other peoples are taking control of their lives and making decisions collectively on the most local level possible, with federated structures coordinating to address matters of collective

concern. In stark contrast to the everyday indifference that is so prevalent in US democracy, these and other scattered instances of life without a centralized state offer far more robust and authentic model for self-determination than anything you can find on an American ballot.

But what about the impact a government shutdown will have on our lives? Won't we suffer the loss of critical services? Sure, we all gripe about Washington and hate politicians, but when it comes down to it, don't we need them?

According to most summaries of the shutdown scenario, most of the actually useful services we get from state bureaucracies or federal programs—Social Security, food stamps, the US Postal Service, free school lunches—will still continue. If we look at the history of these programs, this isn't surprising. Many of them were modeled on autonomous initiatives started by powerful social movements; the government *needs* these programs to keep us from getting used to relying on ourselves. FBI chief super-villain J. Edgar Hoover called the Black Panthers' breakfast program "the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for"; the US Department of Agriculture was forced to start the School Breakfast Program in response, which now feeds 13 million students every day. Early anarchist Lysander Spooner created an independent postal system; in response, the government passed a law granting the US Postal System a monopoly, although Spooner forced the USPS to lower its prices to levels that ordinary people could afford. Advocates of "the people's pension" deserve the credit for social security. If the government weren't hogging all the resources, we might discover that we could maintain these programs better through grassroots organizing.

Now let's look at the government functions that will actually be impacted under a shutdown.

We might not be able to get new passports. But believe it or not, for the vast majority of human history, people traveled freely without them. The problem here is simply that the shutdown doesn't go far enough: if we could shut down government agencies and governments *completely*, we wouldn't need passports in the first place. Tens of millions who lack citizenship status or proper visas could visit their families without fear of losing their homes. Dissidents could leave North Korea and Iran. People with arrest records could travel to Canada from the US without some arrogant jerk in a uniform talking down to them. You could go anywhere on earth without having to fill out a form or apply for a visa.

The shutdown could delay tax refunds. But the IRS will still continue collecting taxes—they just won't give us back the pittance beyond what they claim we "owe." Here's a simple solution: they should stop stealing from us in the first place! It would be better if we could devote our resources to addressing problems directly, not sending checks to Washington so that nepotists and their cronies can buy more pork barrels and cruise missiles. Not only will this save us money—once the Pentagon budget runs out, it'll make nuclear war a lot less likely. If you've been paying taxes in hopes of providing support to the retired senior citizen down the street, you could just give her the money directly instead of giving it to a bunch of bureaucrats taking up a collection in her name.

Federal courts might close if the shutdown lasts longer than ten days. That's a good start, but it would be better if they shut down for good! Two and a half million people are in prison already—as many as were in the gulags under Joseph Stalin. Mass incarceration

is one of the most serious problems in the US today and one of the key linchpins of white supremacy and class domination. Judges and prosecutors should stay home for good; they can count themselves lucky no one gave them a taste of their own medicine. With the foot of the criminal legal system off our necks, we could focus on rebuilding our communities and resolving our problems ourselves without police or prisons. For people who grew up with no models for conflict resolution except for running to the biggest gang in town, this is hard to imagine, but there are plenty of alternatives.

National parks might be shut down. Wait a minute—why would we need politicians and bureaucrats to enjoy the wilderness? It would take about an hour to crowdsource the basic maintenance functions of cleaning and upkeep for facilities. Then we could enjoy all of these supposedly public resources, free of charge.

Last time there was a shutdown, in 2013, one enterprising individual took over mowing the lawn around the Lincoln Memorial. This worked out fine—until the US Park Police interceded and forced him to stop. Obviously, the shutdown didn't go far enough if there were still police on the job to keep people from learning to take care of problems themselves!

Let's be clear: the ones who are most worried about a government shutdown are the politicians themselves. Not for the reasons they claim—that one gang will lose votes to the other gang, or that the paychecks of federal workers will be delayed. No, they're worried because a real shutdown could just show how pointless and parasitic their entire protection racket is. They're worried that if we get a taste of what it's like to organize collectively to solve our problems, we'll never want to stop. Then they would be permanently out of a job.

As anarchists, we've got a hunch that people can get along just fine without a government. We're convinced that everything the government does is either harmful and should be abolished outright (borders, prisons, armies, surveillance) or can be done better by groups of people working together freely (social welfare, preserving wilderness, coordinating production and distribution, collective self-defense).

Don't confuse us with the so-called libertarians who laud the shutdown because they want the capitalist market to reign supreme over everything else. There's no way that the prevailing regime of inequality and private property could exist without the coercive force of the state to enforce it. As anarchists, we're in this for freedom—not the freedom to accumulate profit and property at everyone else's expense, but the freedom to flourish in tandem with everyone, to pursue the concert of our interests without coercion.

Are you with us? Regardless of what the politicians do in the coming days or years, let's work together to shut down the US government once and for all. Then we can get on with our lives.

find each other.



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